

**Shane Wiegand - Racist Policy and Resistance in Rochester, New York Part 2**

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF3RzJuz1C0> (2021 begins at 30 minute mark)

*(See Part 1 of this two-part series to read about the first half of the video.)*

Shaun Wiegand's second half of the video begins by noting that Rochester could have progressed in the vein of Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Underground Railroad, but instead, Systemic Racism played out in the white community including in "Blackface Minstrel Shows" mocking the very being of Black Americans. The show was a standard where participants included Kodak, many higher education and religious institutions, and children in Monroe and Livingston County private and public schools. These persisted through the 1960s and later. NAACP and local Black leaders pushed back pointing out that the "shows" build another generation of White Supremacy.

In the late 1950s, 80% of all Black people lived in just two "bursting at the seams" redlined neighborhoods where many homes did not have a bathroom, 30% did not have running water, and trash pick-up was unreliable causing "rat attacks". Wiegand's careful documentation highlights how those who could afford to leave their neighborhoods faced racial covenants, violence, and hostile new neighbors. Still, searching for better living conditions—often with the help of the NAACP, Black leaders, and sometimes white allies—Black Rochesterians moved bravely and forcefully to demand their economic and human rights to live in neighborhoods and homes of their choosing.

It is important to note that some Black neighborhoods thrived during this period. (See Lunch and Learn: Clarissa Uprooted: Youth and Elders Uncover the History of Black Rochester (2021 [26 mins]) Clarissa Street was a place with grocery stores, and where some of the biggest jazz names in the country came to play. It was mostly a place where, "We didn't have to go anywhere, we had everything we needed right here," (Clarissa Uprooted). And it was a neighborhood decimated by "Urban Renewal" [Black removal] where homes, churches and businesses were knocked down to put in 490 and the Inner Loop. Hundreds and hundreds of people were dislocated with no place to go—because of low reimbursements for houses and businesses lost, redlining, racial covenants, hostile white people—but to overcrowded substandard housing in redlined areas.

The city had a choice. Invest in new economic options for those displaced or increase funding for the police to contain Black neighborhoods; the city—and greater community—chose the latter. At times, white police officers reigned terror on these neighborhoods. In one case, beating a man who was locking up his gas station for "attempting a break in". Black people pushed back in a 1964 Rebellion (a Riot in White Supremacy terms). Most protesters were peaceful, but not all. The Rebellion was met with force that included helicopters overhead, and the National Guard.

In 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed, and more than a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Rochester began to integrate. Wiegand shows images of whites outside Charlotte and Marshall High Schools throwing objects at Black students and screaming racist epithets. In response, Rochester dropped its integration plan. What happened next? Suburban districts, limited by laws that outlawed segregation based on race, doubled down on class-based exclusionary zoning: no low-income housing, no apartments. Today, Penfield is still one of the most segregated districts in the country. And we still see owner occupancy, food insecurity rates, health and disease,

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wealth and education all mirror those redlined maps. Wiegand states that it will take Black people 228 years to accumulate the kind of wealth per capita that white people have now unless we act.

Our community must face this head on. Wiegand ends on a hopeful note with a list of local heroes who pushed back successfully and offers their stories as a template for all of us to take action.

Wiegand reminds us that when we teach children about racism in developmentally appropriate ways, they become active in fighting back! In one case, his students identified the lack of Black teachers in their school and helped move the administration to reassess and change their policy.

If children can act, so can we. Our youth are watching.

## **Additional Resources:**

[Reparations. Finally. - Rochester Beacon](#)